

Myths about Law

Law – the eternally popular career option. But study can be tough, competition remains keen, and finding a job is not necessarily straightforward. If your son or daughter wants to be a legal eagle, rely on factual information rather than urban myths. Let's scotch a few of the latter right now....

Myth # 1 You need a Law A level to get onto a Law degree.

A reasonable assumption, but totally incorrect. Universities actively discourage young people from taking Law at this stage. Perverse or what? But A level Law may only skim the surface and, as we know, a little learning can be a dangerous thing. Don't be deceived: admissions tutors would far rather see a couple of good solid traditional academic subjects such as English or Maths.

Myth #2 All you need to get onto a law degree are reasonable grades at A level or equivalent.

Well you certainly do need these, but it's just ain't that simple anymore. Several highly ranked universities now insist on applicants taking the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT), which examines critical reasoning and essay writing skills.

You can escape the LNAT by choosing a university which doesn't require it, but those A level / equivalent grades will still matter and might need to be sky high rather than merely adequate. They'll also rear their ugly heads at a later date: many legal firms sift their graduate trainees by looking first at their UCAS tariff points.

Myth # 3 A law degree is the best route into a career as a solicitor or barrister.

Emphatically not the case. At least 40% of graduate entrants to the profession have first degrees in other subjects. OK, so it adds a year - and hence more expense - to their education because they currently have to do a Graduate Diploma in Law, but

- employers value their additional expertise and
- students themselves have been known to comment (but whisper it softly) that three years of law, more law and nothing but law can be boring

But, hey, who said any type of degree was necessary? Those raring for a more hands-on approach can qualify as a solicitor by first becoming legal executives or paralegals or by taking a legal apprenticeship. This flexible route will be extended with the new legal qualifications being introduced for both solicitors and barristers later this year.

Myth # 4 Legal recruiters looking for trainee solicitors and pupil barristers focus on their academic grades.

Indeed they do. But they also look for evidence of sustained and relevant work experience: without this any applicant is unlikely to get much further. And that's not all: many candidates have to go through a lengthy selection process of tests and assessment activities before they reach interview stage. Nobody said it was easy....

Myth #5 But it's all worth it because lawyers can earn loads of money.

Er, yes and no. Top law firms pay extremely handsomely, but often at the expense of the work life balance. And if you're constantly expected to spend all of the day and most of the night at your desk for no extra reward, the actual hourly rate for your labours can take a downward dive.

At the other end of the scale, high street solicitors' firms are allowed to pay their trainees a less than princely sum, while many pupil barristers and their newly qualified colleagues are self- employed and only paid for the cases they undertake. (Who mentioned zero-hour contracts?) Need to find out more? Go to www.lawcareers.net

Gill Sharp, March 2021

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